

COORDINATING COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS
Annual Report
January 1 through December 31, 2014

After many years of research and planning, the Coordinating Council on Homelessness (CCOH) was launched on February 1, 2014, for the purpose of improving our success in helping homeless persons gain permanent housing through a coordinated approach involving the entire community.

Number of Persons Housed: The most important measure of success is whether we are increasing the number of persons who regain housing. Although CCOH began in February, the coordinated approach was already in progress. In fiscal year 2013-2014, we were able to assist the community to contribute to the rehousing of 206 persons, an increase of 42% over the previous year.

Special HUD Grant: An important contributor to that increase was an Emergency Services Grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) of \$100,000. We were able to secure this grant because we have a coordinated, community-wide approach. The HUD grant was renewed for 2014-2015 at \$85,000 (everyone in the state received a 15% reduction due to decreases in federal funding).

New Registry of All Clients: We participated in the nation-wide 100,000 Homes campaign, through which we developed a Registry, which is a listing, by name, of every person experiencing homelessness who seeks assistance. Each one is evaluated using a well-researched and tested survey which measures the acuity of their situation and ranks them in order of vulnerability, thereby allowing case workers to direct their efforts toward those most in need of immediate housing.

Zero 2016: We applied for and were chosen as one of 71 communities across the country to participate in Zero: 2106, whose goal is to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015 and chronic homelessness by the end of 2016.

Is this a realistic for Morgantown? Absolutely. Our most recent data indicates approximately a dozen veterans in our area who are homeless. The Veterans Administration, in cooperation with HUD, has significantly increased the financial support available to veterans. Housing an average of one a month is certainly within our capabilities.

For persons who have been experiencing chronic homelessness, the Bartlett House's West Run facility will soon open three dozen new units dedicated especially for them. Caritas House is opening Novus House on its property on Scott Avenue, which will add eight more. We anticipate that these new units will meet much of the need.

Housing our veterans and chronically homeless populations will allow us to focus our attention and funds on rapidly rehousing the other persons on our Registry. By doing that, we will see a major decline in the total number of persons experiencing homelessness in our area.

Housing First: Evidence continues to mount in communities all across the country that housing chronically homeless people with addiction and mental health issues is more cost-effective and more successful than requiring them to make progress on their addictions and illnesses before getting them into housing. Study after study shows that the cost of giving people apartments, even at public expense, is far less expensive than paying for all of the services these people need while they are homeless. The savings range up into the tens of thousands of dollars per person. Therefore, this is our approach to our chronically homeless persons, and getting them into housing is our highest priority. Doing so will release money and energy to assist the rest of the homeless population.

Coordination of Services:

We have taken two major steps forward in coordinating services:

1) The Summit on Homelessness, made up of the executive directors of the major service agencies, is having regular meetings with faithful attendance by the executives of the key agencies which must work closely together if we are to continue to increase our success.

2) The Multi-Disciplinary Team, made up of the case workers from all the key agencies, immediately saw the value and importance of getting together regularly and began meeting every week to coordinate services for their clients experiencing homelessness. New agencies have asked to be included, and there are now representatives of 16 agencies taking part. The value of this teamwork to the clients can not be overstated.

Progress on Fulfilling the Community-Wide Plan to Reduce Homelessness: We are guided in our work by the Community-Wide Plan to Reduce Homelessness developed by the Task Force on Homelessness. The Plan has ten Action Steps. Here is our progress so far:

- ▶ *Goal 1 - To create a central organization to coordinate community-wide action to reduce homelessness*
This goal has been met with the creation of the Coordinating Council on Homelessness.

- ▶ *Goal 2 - To create a day center*

We have been meeting with members of the Economic Development Committee of Main Street Morgantown and members of the City Council to discuss how we might evaluate what we need in the way of facilities to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness. We have agreed to work toward the establishment of a Task Force on Homeless Facilities sponsored jointly by Main Street Morgantown, the City Council, and the Coordinating Council on Homelessness. The purpose will be to investigate the possibility of consolidating homeless services in a building, accessible to downtown but not directly downtown, that would include a day center (which would serve also as a cold shelter), Connecting Link offices, dining room for free community meals, satellite offices for service agencies, especially those not located downtown, and perhaps the Bartlett House. An initial public meeting to explore this idea is planned for Thursday, March 26th, at 6:30 pm in the Arts Mon gallery, under the leadership of a skilled facilitator.

- ▶ *Goal 3 - Enlist all service providers in using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)*
This goal has been met. All critical players are using HMIS.

- ▶ *Goal 4 - Create an affordable housing task force*

This goal has been met by the development of the Community Housing Action Partnership (CHAP) which has adopted the mission of developing safe affordable and handicapped accessible housing in Morgantown and Monongalia County.

- ▶ *Goal 5 - To enhance discharge planning*

This goal is continuously being implemented through the Multi-Disciplinary Team of case workers who meet every week. They have been able to build relationships with hospitals, some of whom are participating in the MDT meetings.

- ▶ *Goal 6 - To create an organized program to prevent homelessness*

This goal is moving forward through the development of a coordinated intake process and the beginnings of a public awareness campaign. There continues to be work to accomplish in this area. Completion of our goals of ending veteran and chronic homelessness will release time and resources to address prevention more directly.

- ▶ *Goal 7 - Develop a process to address the unique needs of rural persons experiencing homelessness*

Service providers in the western end of the county have begun meeting together. Further work on this goal is a major priority for this next year - if we can succeed in increasing the staff position to two-thirds time.

- ▶ *Goal 8 - To develop a new task force to address the lack of addiction recovery services in Monongalia County and the special needs of the chronically homeless*

With the adoption of the "Housing First" approach, we are concentrating on getting chronically homeless persons into housing. We hope to address this goal once we are able to get them successfully housed.

- ▶ *Goal 9 - Develop a public relations and communications strategy to enhance public awareness*

A funding committee now has this as a regular responsibility. Progress includes:

- a logo and brochure have been developed
- a website (ccohwv.org) and Facebook page (Zero: 2016 Monongalia) have been created
- "Ending Homelessness Month," a month-long series of activities in January with:
 - proclamation of January as "Ending Homelessness Month" by the City Council and the County Commission
 - a weekly column by the Executive Director in the Dominion Post
 - an appearance on WBOY TV and "Talk of the Town" on WAJR radio

- publicity on Valley HealthCare's two electronic bulletin boards
- banners on High Street and the WVU pedestrian bridge over Beechurst Avenue

► *Goal 10 - Research and seek funding*

Applications have been made to or are in process for a dozen funders. CCOH will have a major fundraising campaign this spring.

Housing vs. Behavior: One of the things we have learned in this new year is that there is an expectation among some people in our community that those of us who work with persons experiencing homelessness are responsible for their behavior on the street. We believe it is important to distinguish homelessness from behavior. Not all anti-social behavior in the street is committed by persons who are homeless; and certainly the vast majority of persons who are homeless are not in any way behaving inappropriately. We, who are addressing homelessness, believe our efforts will help with some of the behavioral issues, but we cannot be responsible for solving everything. We hope that the City and County will join us in convening a group of a few key people who can take action to address all issues that impact the quality of life downtown for all of its citizens.

The Future: Our success so far indicates that with a coordinated approach and widespread community support, we can greatly reduce, even eliminate homelessness in our community.